

FOR LOVE OF BEASTS

BY
JOHN GALSWORTHY

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FOR LOVE OF BEASTS

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

I

WE had left my rooms, and were walking briskly down the street towards the river, when my friend stopped before the window of a small shop, and said:—

“Gold fish!”

I looked at him, I must say, doubtfully; I had known him so long that I never looked at him in any other way.

“Can you imagine,” he went on, “how any sane person can find pleasure in the sight of those swift things swimming for ever and ever in a bowl about twice the length of their own tails?”

“No,” I said, “I cannot—though, of course, they’re very pretty.”

“That is, no doubt, the reason why they are kept suffering.”

Again I looked at him; there is nothing in the world I distrust so much as irony.

“People don’t think about these things,” I said.

“You are right,” he answered, “they do not. Let me give you some evidence of that. . . . I was travelling last spring in a far country, and made an expedition to a certain woodland spot. Outside the little forest inn I noticed a ring of people and dogs gathered round a grey animal rather larger than a cat. It had a sharp-nosed head too small for its body, and bright black eyes, and was moving

restlessly round and round a pole to which it was tethered by a chain. If a dog came near, it hunched its bushy back, and made a rush at him. Except for that it seemed a shy-souled, timid little thing. In fact, by its eyes, and the way it shrank into itself, you could tell it was scared of everything around. Now, there was a small, thin-faced man in a white jacket, holding up a tub on end, and explaining to the people that this was the little creature's habitat, and that it wanted to get back underneath; and sure enough, when he held the tub within its reach, the little animal stood up at once on its hind-legs and pawed, evidently trying to get the tub to fall down and cover it. The people all laughed at this; the man laughed too, and the little creature went on pawing. At last the man said:—

“ ‘Mind your back-legs, Patsy!’ and let the tub fall. The show was over. But presently another lot came up; the white-coated man lifted the tub, and it began all over again.

“ ‘What is that animal?’ I asked him.

“ ‘A ’coon.’

“ ‘How old?’

“ ‘Three years—too old to tame.’

“ ‘Where did you catch it?’

“ ‘In the forest—lots of ’coons in the forest.’

“ ‘Do they live in the open, or in holes?’

“ ‘Up in the trees, sure; they only gits in the hollows when it rains.’

“ ‘Oh! they live in the open? Then isn’t it queer she should be so fond of her tub?’

“ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘she do that to git away from people!’ and he laughed—a genial little man. ‘She not like people and dogs. She too old to tame. She know *me*, though.’

“ ‘I see,’ I said. ‘You take the tub off her, and show her to the people, and put it back again. Yes, she *would* know you!’

“ ‘Yes,’ he repeated rather proudly, ‘she know me—

Patsy! Presently, you bet, we catch lot more, and make a cage, and put them in.'

"He was gazing very kindly at the little creature, who on her grey hind-legs was anxiously begging for the tub to come down and hide her, and I said, 'But isn't it rather a miserable life for this poor little devil?'

"He gave me a very queer look. 'There's lots of people,' he said—and his voice sounded as if I'd hurt him—'never gits a chance to see a 'coon'—and he dropped the tub over the racoon. . . . Well! Can you conceive anything more pitiful than that poor little wild creature of the open, begging and begging for a tub to fall over it, and shut out all the light and air? Doesn't it show what misery caged things have to go through?'"

"But, surely," I said, "those other people would feel the same as you. The little white-coated man was only a servant."

He seemed to run them over in his memory. "Not one!" he answered slowly. "Not a single one! I am sure it never even occurred to them—why should it? They were there to enjoy themselves."

We walked in silence till I said:—

"I can't help feeling that your little white-coated man was acting good-heartedly according to his lights."

"Quite! What are the sufferings of a racoon compared with the enlargement of the human mind?"

"Don't be extravagant! You know he didn't mean to be cruel."

"Does a man ever mean to be cruel? He merely makes or keeps his living; but to make or keep his living he will do anything that does not absolutely prick to his heart through the skin of his indolence or his obtuseness."

"I think," I said, "that you might have expressed that less cynically, even if it's true."

"Nothing that's true is cynical, and nothing that is cynical is true. Indifference to the suffering of beasts always comes from over-absorption in our own comfort."

"Absorption, not over-absorption, perhaps."

"Ha! Let us see that! Very soon after seeing the racoon, I was staying at the most celebrated health-resort of that country, and, walking in its grounds, I came on an aviary. In the upper cages were canaries, and in the lower cage a splendid hawk. It was as large as our buzzard hawk, brown-backed and winged, light underneath, and with the finest dark brown eyes of any bird I ever saw. The cage was quite ten feet each way; a noble allowance for the very soul of freedom! The bird had every luxury. There was water, and a large piece of raw meat that hadn't been touched. Yet it was never still for a moment, flying from perch to perch, and dropping to the ground again and again so lightly, to run, literally run, up to the bars to see if perhaps—they were not there. Its face was as intelligent as any dog's——"

My friend muttered something I couldn't catch, and then went on:—

"That afternoon I took the drive for which one visits that hotel, and it occurred to me to ask my chauffeur what kind of hawk it was. 'Well,' he said, 'I ain't just too sure what it is they've got caged up now; they changes 'em so often.'

" 'Do you mean,' I said, 'that they die in captivity?'

" 'Yes,' he answered, 'them big birds they soon git moult, and go off.' Well, when I paid my bill I went up to the semblance of proprietor—it was one of those establishments where the only creature responsible is 'Co.'—and I said:

" 'I see you keep a hawk out there?'

" 'Yes. Fine bird. Quite an attraction!'

" 'People like to look at it?'

" 'Just so. They're uncommon—that sort.'

" 'Well,' I said, 'I call it cruel to keep a hawk shut up like that.'

" 'Cruel? Why? What's a hawk, anyway—cruel devils enough!'

“ ‘My dear sir,’ I said, ‘they earn their living just like men; without caring for other creatures’ sufferings. We do not shut you up, apparently, for doing that. Good-bye.’ ”

As he said this, my friend looked at me, and added:—

“You think that was a lapse of taste. What would *you* have said to a man who cloaked the cruelty of his commercial instincts by blaming a hawk for being what God had made him?”

There was such feeling in his voice that I hesitated long before answering.

“Well,” I said, at last, “in England, anyway, we only keep such creatures in captivity for scientific purposes. I doubt if you could find a single instance nowadays of its being done just as a commercial attraction.”

He stared at me.

“Yes,” he said, “we do it publicly and scientifically, to enlarge the mind. But let me put to you this question. Which do you consider has the larger mind—the man who has satisfied his idle curiosity by staring at all the caged animals of the earth, or the man who has been brought up to feel that to keep such indomitable creatures as hawks and eagles, wolves and panthers, shut up, to gratify mere curiosity, is a dreadful thing?”

To that singular question I knew not what to answer. At last I said:—

“I think you underrate the pleasure they give. We English are so awfully fond of animals!”

II

We had entered Battersea Park by now, and since my remark about our love of beasts we had not spoken. A wood pigeon, which had been strutting before us, just then flew up into a tree, and began puffing out its breast. Seeking to break the silence, I said:—

"Pigeons are so complacent."

My friend smiled in his dubious way, and answered:

"Do you know the 'blue rock'?"

"No."

"Ah! there you have a pigeon who has less complacency than any living thing. You see, it depends on circumstances. Suppose, for instance, that we happened to keep Our Selves—perhaps the most complacent class of human beings—in a large space enclosed by iron railings, feeding them carefully, until their natural instincts caused them to run up and down at a considerable speed from side to side of the enclosure. And suppose when we noticed that they had attained the full speed and strength of their legs, we took them out, holding them carefully in order that they might not become exhausted by struggling, and placed them in little tin compartments so dark and stuffy that they would not care of their own accord to stay there, and then stood back about thirty paces, with a shot gun, and pressed a spring which let the tin compartment collapse. And then, as each one of Our Selves ran out, we let fly with the right barrel and peppered him in the tail, whereon, if he fell, we sent a dog out to fetch him in by the slack of his breeches, and after holding him idly for a minute by the neck, we gave it a wring round; or, if he did not fall, we prayed heaven at once, and let fly with the left barrel. Do you think in these circumstances Our Selves would be complacent?"

"Don't be absurd!" I said.

"Very well," he replied, "I will come to 'blue rocks'—do you still maintain that they are so complacent as to deserve their fate?"

"I don't know—I know nothing about their fate."

"What the eyes do not swallow, the heart does not throw up! There are other places, but—have you been to Monte Carlo?"

"No, and I should never think of going there."

"Oh, well," he answered, "it's a great place; but there's

just one little thing about it, and that's in the matter of those 'blue rocks'. You'll agree, I suppose, that no one can complain of people amusing themselves in any way they like, so long as they hurt no one but themselves——"

I caught him up: "I don't, at all."

He smiled: "Yours is perhaps the English point of view. Still——"

"It's more important that they shouldn't hurt themselves than that they shouldn't hurt pigeons, if that's what you're driving at," I said.

"There wouldn't appear to you, I suppose, to be any connection in the matter?"

"I tell you," I repeated, "I know nothing about pigeon-shooting!"

He stared very straight before him.

"Imagine," he said, "a blue sea, and a half-circle of grass, with a low wall. Imagine, on that grass, five traps, from which lead paths—like the rays of a star—to the central point on the base of that half-circle. And imagine on that central point a gentleman with a double-barrelled gun, another man, and a retriever dog. And imagine one of those traps opening, and a little dazed grey bird (not a bit like that fellow you saw just now) emerge, and fly perhaps six yards. And imagine the sound of the gun, and the little bird dipping in its flight, but struggling on. And imagine the sound of the gun again, and the little bird falling to the ground, and wriggling on along it. And imagine the retriever dog run forward and pick it up and walk slowly back with it, still quivering, in his mouth. Or imagine, once in a way, the little bird drop dead as a stone at the first sound. Or imagine again, that it winces at the shots, yet carries on over the boundary, to fall into the sea. Or—but this very seldom—imagine it wing up and out, unhurt, to the first freedom it has ever known. And then, my friend, imagine that to the man who lets no little bird away to freedom there comes much honour, and a nice round sum of money. Imagine all this! Do you still think there is no connection?"

"Well," I said, "it doesn't sound too sportsmanlike. And yet, I suppose, looking at it quite broadly, it does minister in a sort of way to the law of the survival of the fittest."

"In which species—man or pigeon?"

"I am not defending it," I said, "but you must remember that one does not expect high standards at Monte Carlo."

He looked at me. "Do you never read any sporting paper?" he asked.

"No."

"Did you ever hunt the carted stag?"

"Of course I never did."

"Well, you have been coursing, anyway."

"Certainly; but there's no comparing that with pigeon-shooting."

"In coursing, I admit," he said, "there's pleasure to the dogs, and some chance for the hare, who, besides, is not in captivity. Also that where there is no coursing there are few hares, in these days. And yet——" he seemed to fall into a reverie.

Then, looking at me in a queer, mournful sort of way, he said suddenly:—

"I don't wish to attack that sport, when there are so many much worse, but by way of showing you how liable all these things are to contribute to the improvement of our species, I will tell you a little experience of my own. When I was at College, I was in a rather sporting set; we hunted, and played at racing, and loved to be 'au courant' with all that sort of thing. One year it so happened that the uncle of one of us won the Waterloo Cup with a greyhound whose name was—never mind. We became at once ardent lovers of the sport of coursing, consumed by the desire to hold a Waterloo Cup meeting in miniature, with rabbits for hares and our own terriers for greyhounds. Well, we held it; sixteen of us nominating our dogs. Now, kindly note that of those sixteen, eight at least were members of the

aristocracy, and all had been at public schools of standing and repute. For the purposes of our meeting, of course, we required fifteen rabbits caught and kept in bags. These we ordered of a local blackguard, with a due margin over to provide against such of the rabbits as might die of fright before they were let out, or be too terrified to run, after being loosed. We made the fellow whose uncle had won the Waterloo Cup judge, apportioned among ourselves the other officers, and assembled—the judge on horseback, in case a rabbit might happen to run, say, fifty yards. Assembled with us were many local cads, two fourth-rate bookies, our excited, yapping terriers, and twenty-four bagged rabbits. The course was cleared. Two of us advanced, holding our terriers by the loins; the judge signed that he was ready; the first rabbit was turned down. It crept out of the bag, and squatted, close to the ground, with its ears laid back. The local blackguard stirred it with his foot. It crept two yards, and squatted closer. All the terriers began shrieking their little souls out, all the cads began to yell, but the rabbit did not move—its heart, you see, was broken. At last the local blackguard took it up, and wrung its neck. After that some rabbits ran, and some did not, till all were killed! The terrier of one of us was judged the victor by him whose uncle had won the Waterloo Cup; and we went back to our colleges to drink everybody's health. Now, my friend, mark! We were sixteen decent youths, converted by infection into sixteen rabbit-catching cads. Two of us are dead, and two are schoolmasters; but the rest of us—what do we think of it now? I tell you this little incident, to confirm you in your feeling that pigeon-shooting, coursing, and the like, tend to improve our species, even here in England."

III

Before I could comment on my friend's narrative, we were spattered with mud by passing riders, and stopped to repair the damage to our coats.

"Jolly for my new coat!" I said. "Do you notice, by the way, that they are cutting men's tails longer, this spring?"

He raised those quizzical eyebrows of his, and murmured:

"And horses' tails shorter. Did you see those that passed just now?"

"No."

"There were none!"

"Nonsense!" I said; "My dear fellow, you really are obsessed about beasts! They were just ordinary."

"Quite—a few scrubby hairs, and a wriggle."

"Now, please," I said, "don't begin to talk of the cruelty of docking horses' tails, and tell me a story of an old horse in a pond."

"No," he answered, "I should have to invent it. What I was going to say was this: Which do you think the greater fools in the matter of fashion—men or women?"

"Oh! Women."

"Why?"

"There's always some sense at the bottom of men's fashions."

"Even of docking tails?"

"You can't compare it, anyway," I said, "with such a fashion as the wearing of 'aigrettes'. That's a cruel fashion if you like!"

"Ah! But you see," he said, "the women who wear them are ignorant of its cruelty. If they were not, they would never wear them. No gentlewoman wears them, now that the facts have come out."

"What is that you say?" I remarked.

He looked at me gravely.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that any woman of gentle instincts, who knows that the 'aigrette', as they call it, is a nuptial plume sported by the white egret only during the nesting season—and that, in order to obtain it, the mother-birds are shot, and that, after their death, all their young die, too, from hunger and exposure—do you mean to tell me that any gentlewoman, knowing that, wears them? Why! most women are mothers themselves! What would they think of gods who shot women with babies in arms for the sake of obtaining their white skins to wear on their heads, eh?"

"But, my dear fellow," I said, "you see these plumes all about!"

"Only on people who don't mind wearing imitation stuff."

I gaped at him.

"You need not look at me like that," he said: "A woman goes into a shop. She knows that real 'aigrettes' mean killing mother-birds and starving all their nestlings. Therefore, if she's a real gentlewoman she doesn't ask for a real 'aigrette.' But still less does she ask to be supplied with an imitation article so good that people will take her for the wearer of the real thing. I put it to you, would she want to be known as an encourager of such a practice? You can never have seen a *lady* wearing an 'aigrette'."

"What!" I said: "What?"

"So much for the woman who knows about 'aigrettes'," he went on. "Now for the woman who doesn't. Either, when she is told these facts about 'aigrettes' she sets them down as 'hysterical stuff', or she is simply too 'out of it' to know anything. Well, she goes in and asks for an 'aigrette'. Do you think they sell her the real thing—I mean, of course, in England—knowing that it involves the shooting of mother-birds at breeding time? I put it to you: Would they?"

His inability to grasp the real issues astonished me, and I said:—

"You and I happen to have read the evidence about 'aigrettes' and the opinion of the House of Lords' Committee that the feathers of egrets imported into Great Britain are obtained by killing the birds during the breeding season; but you don't suppose, do you, that people whose commercial interests are bound up with the selling of 'aigrettes' are going to read it, or believe it if they do read it?"

"That," he answered, "is cynical, if you like. I feel sure that, in England, people do not sell suspected articles about which there has been so much talk and inquiry as there has been about 'aigrettes', without examining in good faith into the facts of their origin. No, believe me, none of the 'aigrettes' sold in England can have grown on birds."

"This is fantastic," I said. "Why! if what you're saying is true, then—then real 'aigrettes' are all artificial; but that—that would be cheating!"

"Oh, no," he said. "You see, although now prohibited by Law, 'aigrettes' are still in fashion. The word 'real' has therefore become parliamentary. People don't want to be cruel, but they must have 'real aigrettes'. So, all these 'aigrettes' are 'real', unless the customer has a qualm, and then they are 'real imitation aigrettes'. We are a highly civilised people!"

"Oh!" I said: "I see! You have been speaking ironically."

"Have you grasped that?" he answered: "Capital!"

After that we walked in silence.

"The fact is," I said, presently, "ordinary people, shopmen and customers alike, never bother their heads about such things at all."

"Yes," he said sadly, "they take the line of least resistance. It is just that which gives Fashion its chance to make such fools of them."

"You have yet to prove that it does make fools of them."

"I thought I had; but no matter. Take horses' tails—what's left of them—do you defend that fashion?"

"Well," I said, "I——"

"Would you if you were a horse?"

"If you mean that I am a donkey——?"

"Oh, no! Not at all!"

"It's going too far," I said, "to call docking cruel."

"Personally," he answered, "I don't think *it is* going too far. It is painful in itself, and heaven alone knows what irritation horses have to suffer from flies. I admit that it saves a little brushing, and that some are under the delusion that it averts carriage accidents. But put cruelty and utility aside, and look at it from the point of view of fashion. Can anybody say it doesn't spoil a horse's looks?"

"You know perfectly well," I said, "that many people think it smartens him up tremendously. They regard a certain kind of horse as nothing without a docked tail; just as some men are nothing with beards!"

"The parallel with man does not hold, my friend. We are not shaved—with or without our wills—by demi-gods!"

"Exactly! And that is in itself an admission that we are superior to beasts, and have a right to some say in their appearance."

"I will not," he answered, "for one moment allow that men are superior to horses in point of looks. Take yourself, or any other personable man, and stand him up against a thoroughbred, and ask your friends to come and look. How much of their admiration do you think you will get?"

It was not the sort of question I could answer.

"I am not speaking at random," he went on; "I have seen the average lord walking beside the average winner of the Derby."

"But it's just on this point of looks that people defend docking," I said. "They breed the horses, and have a right to their own taste. Many people dislike long swishy appendages."

"And bull-terriers, or Yorkshires, or Great Danes, with natural ears; and fox-terriers and spaniels with uncut tails;

and women with merely the middles so small as God gave them?"

"If you're simply going to joke——"

"I never was more serious. The whole thing is of a piece, and summed up in the word 'smart', which you used just now. That word, sir, is the guardian angel of all fashions, and if you don't mind my saying so, fashions are the guardian angels of vulgarity. Now, a horse is not a vulgar animal, and I can never get away from the thought that to dock his tail must hurt his feeling of refinement."

"Well, if that's all, I dare say he'll get over it."

"But will the man who does it?"

"You must come with me to the Horse Show," I said, "and look at the men who have to do with horses; then you'll know if such a thing as docking the tails of these creatures can do them harm or not. And, by the way, you talk of refinement and vulgarity. What is your test? Where is the standard? It's all a matter of taste."

"You want me to define these things?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Very well! Do you believe in what we call the instincts of a gentleman?"

"Of course."

"Such as: The instinct to be self-controlled; not to be rude or intolerant; not to 'slop-over'; not to fuss, nor to cry out; to hold the head up, so that people refrain from taking liberties; to be ready to do things for others, to be chary of asking others to do things for oneself, and grateful when they do them."

"Yes," I said, "all these I believe in."

"What central truth do you imagine that these things come from?"

"Well, they're all such a matter of course—I don't think I ever considered."

"If by any chance," he replied, "you ever do, you will find they come from an innate worship of balance, of the just mean; an inborn reverence for due proportion, a

natural sense of harmony and rhythm, and a consequent mistrust of extravagance. What is a bounder? Just a man without sufficient sense of proportion to know that he is not so important in the scheme of things as he thinks he is!"

"You are right there."

"Very well. Refinement is a quality of the individual who has—and conforms to—a true (not a conventional) sense of proportion; and vulgarity is either the natural conduct of people without that sense of proportion, or of people who imitate and reproduce the tricks of refinement wholesale, without any real feeling for proportion; or again, it is mere conscious departure from the sense of proportion for the sake of cutting a dash."

"Ah!" I said; "and to which of these kinds of vulgarity is the fashion of docking horses' tails a guardian angel?"

"Imagine," he answered gravely, "that you dock your horse's tail. You are either horribly deficient in feeling for a perfectly proportioned horse; or you imitate what you believe to be the refined custom of docking horses' tails, without considering the question of proportion at all."

"Yes," I said; "but what makes so many people do it, if there isn't something in it, either useful or ornamental?"

"Because people as a rule do not love proportion; they love the grotesque. You have only to look at their faces, which are very good indications of their souls."

"Who have begged the question," I said. "Who are you to say that the perfect horse is not the horse——?"

"With the imperfect tail?"

"Imperfect? Again, you're begging."

"Natural, then. Oh! my dear man," he went on with vehemence, "think of the luxury of your own tail. Think of the cool swish of it. Think of the real beauty of it! Think of the sheer hideousness of all that great front balanced behind by a few scrub hairs and a wriggle. It became 'smart' to dock horses' tails; and smart to wear 'aigrettes'. 'Smart'—'neat'—'efficient'—for all except the horse and the poor egrets."

"Your argument," I said, "is practically nothing but æsthetics."

He fixed his eyes upon my hat.

"Well," he said slowly, "I admit that neither on horse nor on man would long tails go at all well with that bowler hat of yours. Odd how all of a piece taste is! From a man's hat, or a horse's tail, we can reconstruct the age we live in, like that scientist, you remember, who reconstructed a mastodon from its funny-bone."

The thought went sharply through my head: Is that to be his next? Till I remembered with relief that the animal was extinct, at all events in England.

IV

With but little further talk we had nearly reached my rooms, when he said abruptly:—

"A lark! Can't you hear it? Over there, in that wretched little gold-fish shop again."

But I could only hear the sounds of traffic.

"It's your imagination," I said. "It really is too lively on the subject of birds and beasts."

"I tell you," he persisted, "there's a caged lark there. Very likely, half-a-dozen."

"My dear fellow," I said, "suppose there are. We could go and buy them and set them free, but it would only encourage the demand. Or we could assault the shopmen. Do you recommend that?"

"I don't joke on this subject," he answered shortly.

"But surely," I said, "if we can't do anything to help the poor things, we had better keep our ears from hearing."

"And our eyes shut? Suppose we all did that, what sort of world should we be living in?"

"Very much the same as now, I expect."

"Blasphemy! Rank, hopeless blasphemy!"

"Please don't exaggerate!"

"I am not. There is only one possible defence of that attitude, and it's this: The world is—and was deliberately meant to be—divided into two halves: the half that suffers and the half that benefits by that suffering."

"Well?"

"Is it so?"

"Perhaps."

"You acquiesce in that definition of the world's nature? Very well, if you belong to the first half you are a poor-spirited skunk, consciously acquiescing in your own misery. If to the second, you are a brute, and an accursed brute, consciously acquiescing in your own happiness, at the expense of others. Well, which are you?"

"I have not said that I belong to either."

"There are only two halves to a whole. No, my friend, disabuse yourself once for all of that cheap and comfortable philosophy of shutting your eyes to what you think you can't remedy, unless you are willing to be labelled 'accursed brute'."

"Well," I said, "after that, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what I can do by making myself miserable over things I can't help?"

"I will," he answered: "In the first place, kindly consider that you are not living in a private world of your own. Everything you say and do and think has its effect on everybody around you. For example, if you feel, and say loudly enough, that it is an infernal shame to keep larks and other wild song-birds in cages, you will infallibly infect a number of other people with that sentiment, and in course of time those people who feel as you do will become so numerous that larks, thrushes, blackbirds, and linnets will no longer be caught and kept in cages. Whereas, if you merely think: 'Oh! this is dreadful, quite too dreadful, but, you see, I can do nothing; therefore consideration for myself and others demands that I shall stop my ears and hold my tongue,' then, indeed, nothing will ever be done, and larks, blackbirds, etc., will continue to be caught and

prisoned. How do you imagine it ever came about that bears and bulls and badgers are no longer baited; cocks no longer openly encouraged to tear each other in pieces; donkeys no longer beaten to a pulp? Only by people going about and shouting out that these things made them uncomfortable. How did it come about that more than half the population of this country are not still classed as 'beasts' under the law? Simply because a few of our ancestors were made unhappy by seeing their fellow-creatures owned and treated like dogs, and roundly said so—in fact, were not ashamed to be sentimental humanitarians like me."

"That is all obvious. But my point is that there is moderation in all things, and a time for everything."

"By your leave," he said, "there is little moderation desirable when we are face to face with real suffering, and, as a general rule, no time like the present."

"But there is, as you were saying just now, such a thing as a sense of proportion. I cannot see that it's my business to excite myself about the caging of larks, when there are so many much greater evils."

"Forgive my saying so," he answered, "but if, when a caged lark comes under your nose, excitement does not take hold of you, with or without your will, there is mighty little chance of your getting excited about anything. For, consider what it means to be a caged lark—what pining and misery for that poor little soul, which only lives for its song up in the blue. Consider what blasphemy against God and Nature, and what an insult to all that is high and poetic in Man, it is to cage such an exquisite thing of freedom!"

"You forget that it is done out of love for the song—to bring it into towns where people can't otherwise hear it."

"It is done for a living—and that people without imagination may squeeze out of slowly dying things a momentary gratification!"

"It is not a crime to have no imagination."

"No, sir; but neither is the lack of it a thing to

pride oneself on, or pass by in silence, when it inflicts suffering."

"I am not defending the custom of caging larks."

"No; but you are responsible for its continuance."

"I?"

"You! and all those other people who believe in minding your own business."

"Really!" I said; "you must not attack people on that ground. We cannot all be busybodies!"

"God forbid!" he answered. "But when a thing exists which you really abhor—as you do this—I do wish you would consider a little whether, in letting it strictly alone, you are minding your own business on principle, or because it is so jolly comfortable to do so."

"Speaking for myself——"

"Yes," he broke in; "quite! But let me ask you one thing: Have you, as a member of the human race, any feeling that you share in the advancement of its gentleness, of its sense of beauty and justice—that, in proportion as the human race becomes more lovable and lovely, you too become more lovable and lovely?"

"Naturally."

"Then is it not your business to support all that you feel makes for that advancing perfection?"

"I don't say that it isn't."

"In that case it is *not* your business to stop your ears, and shut your eyes, and hold your tongue, when you come across wild song-birds caged."

But we had reached my rooms.

"Before I go in," I said, "there is just one little thing I've got to say to you: Don't you think that, for a man with your 'sense of proportion', you exaggerate the importance of beasts and their happiness?"

He looked at me for a long time without speaking, and when he did speak, it was in a queer, abstracted voice:—

"I have often thought over that," he said, "and honestly I don't believe I do. For I have observed that before men

can be gentle and broad-minded with each other, they are always gentle and broad-minded about beasts. These dumb things, so beautiful—even the plain ones—in their different ways, and so touching in their dumbness, do draw us to magnanimity, and help the wings of our hearts to grow. No; I don't think I exaggerate, my friend. God knows I don't want to! There is no disservice one can do to all these helpless things so great as to ride past the hounds, to fly so far in front of public feeling as to cause nausea. But I feel—I seem to know—that most of us, deep down, really love these furred and feathered creatures that cannot save themselves from us—that are like our own children, because they are helpless; that are in a way sacred, because in them we watch, and through them we understand, those greatest blessings of the earth—Beauty and Freedom. They give us so much, they ask nothing from us. What can we do in return, but spare them all the suffering we can? No, my friend; I do not think—whether for their sakes or our own—that I exaggerate."

When he had said those words he turned away, and left me standing there.

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